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ABSTRACT

This practicum was designed to develop and implement innovative strategies to improve home/school communication and to increase family involvement of hard-to-reach parents in an effort to cultivate healthy home/school relationships and an open and friendly school climate resulting in a more effective high school. The writer established an advisory of stakeholders to govern a family outreach project, organized a program to provide student greeters and tour guides for school visitors, and enriched the hospitable feeling of the school's entrance area. Written, telephone, and face-to-face communication was increased and a comprehensive application of electronic media was targeted at underrepresented families. The writer advocated building personal relationships with families through school social events and collaborated with community-based organizations to foster healthy home/school relationships. Examination of the data revealed that as a result of this initiative there was a heightened awareness and interest in school/family relationships as well as the importance of school culture among the school staff. Enhanced communication increased family attendance at school events and raised parent's consciousness of school news and information. Post-survey results indicated that families recognize the school as a more friendly, open, and welcome place. (Contains 61 references.) (Author)

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Increasing the Involvement of Underrepresented Families in an Urban High School Ninth Grade Through Enhanced Communication and Community Outreach

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by

Dennis P. Gallagher

Cluster 43

A Practicum II Report
presented to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

1994

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

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Approved:

June 20, 1994
Date of Final Approval of Report

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A few very close friends and doctoral colleagues furnished consistent counsel and encouragement from concept to completion. Their nurture and support is embodied in this manuscript.

But it was the inspiration and assistance of another dedicated scholar who offered criticism and comfort, provided direction and balance and whose perception and reasoning I value foremost. She is my best friend, my wife, Vicky.

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ABSTRACT

Increasing the Involvement of Underrepresented Families in an Urban High School Ninth Grade Through Enhanced Communication And Community Outreach. Gallagher, Dennis P., 1994: Practicum Report, Nova Southeastern University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Parent Participation/Family Involvement/School Community Relationship/Communication/UrbanSchools/HispanicAmericans/ Secondary School Students/Parent School Relationship/ Parent Attitudes/Academic Achievement

This practicum was designed to develop and implement innovative strategies to improve home/school communication and to increase family involvement of hard-to-reach parents in an effort to cultivate healthy home/school relationships and an open and friendly school climate resulting in a more effective high school.

The writer established an advisory of stakeholders to govern a family outreach project, organized a program to provide student greeters and tour guides for school visitors, and enriched the hospitable feeling of the school's entrance area. Written, telephone and face-to-face communication was increased and a comprehensive application of electronic media was targeted at underrepresented families. The writer advocated building personal relationships with families through school social events and collaborated with community based organizations to foster healthy home/school relationships.

Examination of the data revealed that as a result of this initiative there was a heightened awareness and interest in school/family relationships as well as the importance of school culture among the school staff. Enhanced communication increased family attendance at school events and raised parent's consciousness of school news and information. Post-survey results indicated that families recognize the school as a more friendly, open and welcome place.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Work Setting and Community

The work setting for the writer was a large urban high school in the northeast. This city of 70,203 residents was once a prosperous textile producing center and was the woolen capital of America during the industrial revolution. Like so many cities in the northeast, congestion, labor problems, and the invention of alternative power sources persuaded factory owners to flee south during the 1940s and 1950s. This city, once a major destination after Ellis Island, was to face decades of hard times.

The city had an unemployment rate triple that of the state. The socioeconomic picture was best illustrated by that fact that 81% of the students at the high school qualified for the free or reduced federal breakfast and lunch program. The social blights that accompany severe poverty were also very evident in the city. Drug traffic was high in the crumbling housing projects built for returning WW II veterans. Street crime was rampant and was increasing. Street gangs and prostitutes had taken ownership of many neighborhoods. The community's teen pregnancy rate was the highest reported in the state. An alarming high arson rate had created a grave dilemma. Since the spring of 1991, 335

residential fires had blackened the city's landscape. Over 400 buildings were abandoned or boarded up and 76% of the housing was not owner occupied. This once proud city appeared tired and decaying.

As with many working class urban centers, different populations come and go through the generations. The newest immigrants to the city were Latinos. The 1990 census indicated that 42% of the city's residents were Latino, though considering alien status, social service and school department officials suggested that actual numbers were considerably higher. The second but smaller new population to inhabit the city was primarily represented by Asian residents.

Establishing a foothold in the community had been a difficult process for these newcomers. A halt in the economy of both the state and the region had forced many low and moderate income families to depend on the public welfare system for survival. This dependence on public support, some implied, crippled the inspiration to achieve, sustained low self-image, and distanced one from the American dream. While the Latino population earnestly tried to become organized and form a power base that fairly represented it's numbers, a poor economic outlook for the city along with bureaucratic racism had make progress slow.

The high school was the only comprehensive public high school in the city. There were four other private secondary schools in the community, but like any true open organization, the public high school was free and open to all. The school was a microcosm of the city, and as such, exhibited all the problems inherent. The school had a population of 2086 students; 1723 or 83% were of minority status.

The school had the highest percentage of students in the entire northeast whose first language was not English (more than 74%). The most prevalent languages were Spanish, Khmer, Vietnamese, Portuguese, and Arabic. The high school had a full bilingual curriculum in all academic disciplines. State law mandated such a program to meet the needs of these students.

Money was clearly an issue having a profound impact on the school system. The per pupil expenditure of $4,004 was the lowest of any city in the state. Other characteristics though common to many inner-city schools, made this institution different and unique. Academic performance at the school needed dramatic improvement. Ninth grade students tested in 1990 revealed that only 27% of this class passed the state basic skills test. During the 1991-1992 school year, 213 high school students were suspended out of school, 254 received in-school suspension and 50 were expelled from school. In June 1992, 399 students were retained school wide for academic reasons and 33.4% of ninth grade students had dropped out. The school attendance rate was approximately 81% daily with 10% to 12% of these students arriving tardy. The average combined SAT score was 663 for the 1992 senior class, though an impressive 79% of this graduating class went on to higher education.

Since the school did exhibit numerous needs, there were a myriad of support services and collaborative efforts available in the school. The school district employed a highly productive grant writing staff that produced $10.7 million in 1991-1992. Business partnerships were actively involved in tutoring and mentorship projects. Community and

social service organizations had workers with offices located in the school. A school volunteer enterprise enlisted the assistance of working professionals and retirees. The high school participated in several successful cooperative ventures with local colleges and universities to sponsor after school and weekend career training incentives and college prep initiatives.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The writer was in his 20th year serving in public education and for the last 16 years had been a guidance counselor at this urban high school. The writer had a bachelor's degree in special education, a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling, was a certified school psychologist, and was a candidate for a doctorate in education. Given the needs of the population in such a school, the demands of the guidance and counseling department were enormous. The writer's caseload was approximately 325 students; therefore, students often received a band-aid approach to personal situations as the main office in an urban high school compares well with an emergency room in a city hospital.

In the fall of 1992, the school implemented a major restructuring effort. The school was divided into four houses or schools within the school. These houses were primarily designed for improved student management. Each house had a separate staff and administration. The goal was to provide a case management approach to service students. In order to address the considerable needs of the ninth grade and ease the trying time of eighth grade to high school transition, the ninth grade

became a separate house.

The writer was one of two counselors assigned to the freshman house and was also a member of the house management team. The team was comprised of the two counselors, a department head, two lead teachers and was headed by an assistant principal. The management team met weekly and was responsible for the operation, administration, and supervision of the ninth grade house and a staff of 52 professionals.

The role of the writer was to provide personal and academic counseling to grade nine students, to meet with parents and families of students, to work with social service agencies in the community, to consult with grade nine teachers, and to support the assistant principal in the administration of the freshman house.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

Changes in society and family structure over the last twenty years have had a great impact upon schools. In urban America especially, single parent families, stepfamilies and fostercare define the family unit for many children. Constant mobility of families has interrupted solid relationships within the community. An influx of immigrants has placed multitudes of children in our schools whose language and culture is often different from their teachers. Many parents are at risk themselves suffering from alcoholism, drug and child abuse or having bad memories of their own school experience. Other parents are confused about adolescent development and fear the problems, violence, and temptations that face today's adolescent daily. The "Ozzie and Harriet" family has all but vanished.

Schools have changed as well. Societal needs have placed increased demands and stress on the teacher, classrooms simulate social service agencies, and time has been usurped from academics. Secondary schools have become larger, more departmentalized, less sensitive, and teachers are more specialized and unprepared to work with families.

The result, the writer believed, was that many secondary schools

operate in isolation of the community. In turn, the community has little contact or involvement with the school. Many high schools were not customer service based and inadvertently build a moat around the building. These schools, though perhaps without intent, do not foster productive relationships with the community, do little to inform or consult with parents, and may even feel that underrepresented families don't care about or want to participate in their children's education. Such was the case, felt the writer, with this inner-city high school.

The setting for this initiative was a high school experiencing difficulty with family involvement. The majority of the faculty had been urban educators at this school for twenty years or more. Limited budgets and hiring freezes in recent years had halted any influx of young, effervescent teachers. This school was not the same institution in which they had begun their careers. In that time, they had witnessed a decline in the involvement of parents in the school. Yet, the school had remained traditional in structure. This had become a frustrating situation for the staff. Leadership had been inconsistent; the writer had worked with seven different principals during his tenure. With each change in administration came new ideas and policies, then new ones again. Few were fully implemented.

A few principals made feeble attempts to resurrect a matrix of former parent groups. Their intentions were valiant, but their methods and visions of parent involvement were antiquated. These efforts collapsed in frustration. The most recent outgoing principal had initiated an effort to embrace parents a year prior to this project. Parents were individually invited to a group meeting with the school

staff. He gave an inspiring speech which was translated into Spanish before an impressively large crowd. Parents filled out information sheets and left enthusiastic about the future. There was never another parent meeting, no parent association was formed and the information sheets were filed away. A valiant effort had begun, but the school's lack of follow-up inflicted greater damage to a relationship with the community than had no initiative been attempted.

Family attendance at athletic events, fine arts performances, open house, and parents' night was very poor. Often not even family members of the students involved in the activity attended. Staff attendance at many such events was low as well.

The school is a turn of the century, brick, five story, somewhat intimidating building covering two city blocks in an unfavorable section of the city. Upon entering, visitors were challenged to find the office, sign in, and search for their destination. Parents and other visitors did not feel comfortable and welcome in the building, though most of the staff was friendly and cooperative.

The school did send out progress reports each quarter by mail in Spanish and English, but it was the responsibility of the student to bring his/her report card home to parents. The school did print student and parent handbooks but again, the student was relied upon to share this information with his/her family. The only other written communication to parents were letters of suspension, exclusion and other discipline actions. Though the establishment of the house system had greatly improved contact with parents, primarily initiated by the freshman assistant principal and counselor, families received little

positive communication from the school. By and large most parents were unaware of school rules, policies, and important dates on the school calendar.

Rather than the existing situation, the writer felt that the students, their families, and the school would benefit from a strong presence of families at school events and activities. Communication with the home would be informative and two-way. This communication would be clear, consistent and in the family's first language whenever possible. The school would utilize innovative methods of communication and community outreach to extend a welcome and provide information to underrepresented families.

Briefly stated then, the problem, as experienced by the writer, was that there was poor family involvement in an urban school ninth grade and a lack of effective home/school communication.

Problem Documentation

In order to document the existence of the problem, the writer collected and analyzed data from several sources. The writer polled staff concerning the number of family members they met with on a variety of occasions during the year. The writer conducted two formal surveys to obtain information and also made conclusions from personal observations.

In November of 1992, as in each school year, the high school conducted an open house evening. All staff members were required to attend this two hour opportunity for the families to meet with teachers,

counselors and administrators. First quarter report cards were issued that evening, giving both the student and parent the first opportunity to see their grades and be able to discuss them with teachers. Refreshments were offered in the school cafeteria.

In the week that followed the writer polled each grade nine staff member asking how many of their students had family members that met with them during the open house. There were 52 staff members in the freshman house. Of these, 41 staff reported that they had met with 5 or less parents on the evening of the open house. The range varied from a high of one teacher that had met with 18 parents to a low of teachers that had not met any parents. A total of 7 teachers reported not meeting with any family members at the open house.

Also in the fall of 1992, the grade nine house presented a parents' night for freshman parents only, and their children. Invitations for the evening were sent home with the students and staff were invited but not required, as per the teachers contractual agreement, to attend. The home economics department and several teachers prepared refreshments for the evening and the house management team prepared an agenda. Of the 52 staff members in the house, 14 were present at the meeting. There were 645 students in the freshman class and for that number, 11 family members attended the parents' night.

In June 1993, the writer conducted a survey of staff and parents to assess the school's efforts at working with families and collect data about school/home relations, communication, and community support. The writer utilized Taking Stock: The Inventory of Family, Community and School Support for Student Achievement (Berla, Garlington, &

Henderson, 1993) as the survey instrument. The survey contains 20 yes/no, forced choice questions and five open-ended essay questions. Taking Stock consists of two questionnaires, one for educators, the other for families. The questionnaire is also printed in Spanish. Although the same questions are asked of each group, the wording of the questions for families is more personal.

The inventory groups the questions into five general areas and each respondent is asked to rate the school's performance in each area from excellent to poor. The five areas are: reaching out to families, welcoming families, strong relationships, understanding the curriculum and more effective parents.

The survey results indicated that 29 of 32 grade nine staff members surveyed, rated the school's communication with families as poor to fair. One respondent rated communication as excellent and two rated communications as good. For the purpose of this initiative the writer was primarily concerned with the staff's responses to the inventory's section on reaching out to families, which refers to home/school communications, though other topical area questions were analyzed for comparison with the family questionnaires. It should be noted that the families concurred with the staff on question items about home/school communication. They rated the section on reaching out to families as poor to fair, as well.

The writer also conducted a telephone survey of families using the Taking Stock questionnaire. The inventory was completed by 60 families. Forty-two of the 60 inventories were conducted in Spanish, 4 were conducted in Vietnamese and the remaining 14 were conducted in

English. The survey was conducted by students from the senior class, in their native language, as well as by the writer. These numbers fairly represent the general population of grade nine parents. The question items in the welcoming families section of the questionnaire revealed that 58 of 60 families rated the school's openness and welcome to families as poor to fair. Two respondents rated the school's openness and welcome to families as good. It should be noted that the staff did not rate these same items as low and rated the school's openness and welcome to families slightly better than was the perception noted by the family respondents.

Personal observations of the writer also support the existence of the problem. The writer attended many high school activities and events and noted that attendance of family members was very poor. In telephone conversations and meetings with parents and other family members the writer also noted that many families were not aware of important dates on the school calendar, they did not have a full understanding of school policies, available support systems, alternative education programs, and were often not even aware of their child's academic standing.

Causative Analysis

It was the writer's belief that there were three general causes of the problem. First, it was the writer's feeling that the school did not communicate consistently or openly with families. There were few written materials sent out to families. Often the only correspondence received by parents was negative in nature, adding to unfavorable, possibly pessimistic feelings towards the school and about their child's education. Information regarding curriculum, course of studies, student handbooks, study skills and school calendars were available only when parents visited the school or when brought home by the student.

Effective teacher to parent communication was hampered by limited access to telephones for teacher use during the school day. Most teachers did not live in the community and therefore bore the cost of phone contact in the evening. There were two telephones in the freshman house area, one in the writer's office and one in the assistant principal's office. They were both in almost constant use and did not provide privacy.

Though there were a significant number of staff members that spoke Spanish, there were not always translators available to aid teachers in communicating with parents. In most cases student translators were used for such purposes. In some situations this practice was clearly not appropriate.

Second, it was the feeling of the writer that families did not feel welcome in the school and did not view the school as a friendly and safe

place. The building had 32 doors. One of these doors had been designated as a visitors' entrance. A small sign on the doors noted that the door was open from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm only and instructed late that students go to another door to be signed in as tardy. It also demanded that all visitors report to the main office to sign in. Once inside, there were small signs directing visitors to various offices. The signs were 10 to 12 feet up on the wall, not at eye level and were so out-of-date that they directed visitors to offices that no longer existed, to see people that no longer worked in the school.

Most visitors were not fluent in English. Often these visitors were found in the hallways of the school, searching for their destination; very often, they were met and greeted by a congenial staff member that could not communicate in the visitor's first language.

Simply the size and design of a large bureaucratic appearing building intimidated many visitors to the school. The layout of the building was not user-friendly. The entrance area was not a hospitable space and did not embrace visitors as welcome guests.

Third, the writer believed that underrepresented families cannot be reached through traditional methods of communication and are therefore not afforded the opportunity or the encouragement to become involved in the school.

The school serviced an extremely transient population. This characteristic is common of Caribbean and Latin American immigrants, as well as families of poverty. The constant flow of student entries and withdrawals was an administrative, logistical nightmare; one that complicated case management, created a paper chase maze and

hampered effective home/school communication.

Most of the students in this high school were members of at-risk families. Poverty and the associated social complications constructed barriers preventing the possibility of even mediocre communication. The writer sometimes referred to such non-participating families as families that don't know, that they don't know. They had become victims.

Many families did not notify the school when they moved. Illegal aliens did not respond to inquires from school in fear of jeopardizing their status. Many parents had childcare responsibilities. Some linguistic minority parents feared they would not be able to communicate with school officials resulting in feelings of alienation and powerlessness. Under such conditions, underrepresented families and the school had difficulty making connections through traditional methods of home/school communication.

Many such families could not afford a telephone and shared telephones with other families in multi-unit dwellings. The writer frequently called emergency numbers from student records only to wait for the answering party to run up the street and notify the family that the school was calling.

Progress reports, curriculum guides, and school policy manuals are sometimes written like technical documents. Underrepresented family members and parents may have had school experiences of their own that were less than pleasant. Text and information in such manuals can be confusing, and intimidating to these families, to those with limited English and certainly to those that are illiterate.

Childcare responsibilities, working parents and single parents

presented additional barriers to reach families in traditional ways. High at-risk children were in constant motion, from foster home to foster home, from group home to group home, and from lock-up to jail. The system often lost them in the transition. In turn, children lost their education. The city's high incidence of teen pregnancy along with the large size of many extended Latino families resulted in obligations at home that took precedence over involvement at school.

Many of these families were under extreme pressure from economic and social stresses. Day to day their energy was expended attending to basic survival needs; trips to the hospital, to social service agencies, to welfare, to vocational training programs, and to court. The despair felt by these families caused parents to feel that they could not contribute to, or effectively communicate, with school.

Some underrepresented families simply did not appear at school because of transportation problems. Many urban parents do not have automobiles, recent immigrants may not be familiar with public transportation, and still others cannot afford either.

The causes of this problem, in summation, were rooted from many sources. Some were outside the school's circle of influence, others awaited alleviation. One outcome was certain. Untouched, the causes would fester, the problem deteriorate, and the talent and energy of families and schools working together would be lost.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

A review of the literature revealed numerous references to the problem. Henderson, Marburger, and Ooms (1986), Epstein (1991), and Nettles (1991) all note that, though most schools embrace the concepts that a quality home/school relationship is vital to a child's education, that there must be effective and appropriate communication and that schools must provide an atmosphere that encourages family involvement, few have translated their beliefs into action plans. Both families and schools want the best for their children, assert these researchers, and since they share common goals, it is obvious they should work together.

In 1983, "A Nation at Risk" was released by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The report shook up the nation with it's assessment on the state of affairs. Emphasizing family involvement, the commission noted, "obviously, faculty members and administrators, along with policy makers and the mass media, will play a crucial role in the reform of the educational system. But even more important is the role of parents and students" (cited in Academic Develop Institute, 1990, p. 24).

Family involvement, "is neither a quick fix nor a luxury" (p.148), according to Henderson (1988). The involvement of families in their child's education is an absolute necessity in a healthy and effective public school education. This consultant from the National Committee for Citizens in Education goes on to point out that the evidence is extensive and conclusive, saying that "parent involvement in almost any

form appears to produce measurable gains in student achievement" (p.149).

She notes that at a time when there is a wave of public dissatisfaction with public education, it is also time for schools to extend a hand to the community and enlist the help of parents rather than assume that parents are part of the problem. Not only do students perform better in school when their families are involved, but there is an aggregate effect on the performance of students and teachers when schools collaborate with families.

Henderson as well as Ascher (1988) indicate it is clear that parents do not have to be well-educated to make a difference. In fact, children from low-income and minority families benefit the most when their families are involved in their schooling. This concept is reinforced by Epstein and Dauber (1991) and Davies (1988) as they reveal that though many educators and scholars view these families in light of their deficiencies, the deficiencies veritably lie in the schools' programs.

While the positive results of parent involvement at early levels have long been known, recent studies (Bryant, 1989; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Stouffer, 1992) have presented evidence of the significant benefits derived from involving parents in the high school years.

This being the case, and considering the demographics of this high school, it was important to examine family involvement from a multicultural perspective. Chavkin (1989) focused on this critical issue. She notes that it is essential that schools view the link between home and school with cultural environments in mind.

Other literature documents the impact of family involvement in

school. So compelling, is the existence of community involvement in our schools, that several educational periodicals recently devoted entire issues to the subject. Education Week (Staff, 1990), the National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin (Koerner, 1992), Phi Delta Kappan (Gough, 1991a), and Principal (Greene, 1992) all published special reports highlighting the profound influence and consequence that family involvement has upon American public school education.

A widely referred to special report by the National Committee for Citizens in Education (Henderson, 1987) examines 49 studies that confirm parent involvement as improving student achievement, is key to successful programs, and is an essential block in the foundation of successful schools. The studies of Schlamberg and Chong-Hee (1986) support the need for family involvement to reinforce higher expectations.

Concerned educators are always in constant search of measures to improve schools and listen to convincing evidence of successful solutions. Practitioners meet across the country at local and national conferences and symposiums sharing concerns, ideas and strategies to address the problem of poor family involvement in education. Published conference proceedings (Massachusetts, 1990, 1991, 1992; RMC Research Corporation, 1992) discussing current research, theory, policy development and state-of-the-art practices regarding family and community involvement are a valuable resource for educators. As a result of such conferences says Marburger (1992), educators must get serious, join and get active in the myriad of national, state and local organizations that collect, organize, and disseminate information to parents, administrators and teachers to learn about family involvement.

Davies (1993) discusses the League of Schools Reaching Out, a national reform project whose collaborative efforts show how school-family-community partnership can move towards excellence in education and the success of all children particularly those we label as at-risk.

Many researchers (Chandler, 1991; Chavkin, 1989; Inger, 1992; Jackson & Cooper, 1992) point out low participation of families in schools within the Latino community. It is a myth, reveal these researchers, that minority parents don't care about education as much as Anglo parents. If educators do not develop innovative plans that emphasize a multicultural perspective on parent involvement, school/family partnerships within our large urban centers are doomed to fail.

Even proven successful school partnerships, like mentorship programs, according to Gallagher (1992), though they clearly increase attendance, improve achievement, and develop enhanced student self-image, fall short of their impact potential if they neglect a family involvement component.

One can draw several conclusions from the references to the problem in this review of the literature. The research tells us that school improvement can succeed best when it is a collective effort of all groups of society. Parents are a key group in this effort. We also know that, though parent involvement is closely related to school effectiveness and student academic achievement, it is a missing ingredient in many secondary schools. The family is a valuable and nearly untapped resource, especially in our cities, that we can no longer ignore. The success of public education lies in the balance.

Several causes of the problem are noted in the literature. Upheavals in family structure and societal stress have greatly effected family/school ties. Coleman (1991) contends that today's families confront daily perplexing questions about how to use their time and energy and when decisions are made, the needs of children are often overshadowed by other demands. Olson (1990) purports that by 1995, four of five school age children will have mothers in the labor force, half of all marriages will end in divorce, two of every five children will live with stepfamilies or single parents, and better than two of every five black and Hispanic children will live in poverty. Family dynamics are changing.

Gough (1991b) notes that because of such societal stress many parents fail to attend to their children's most basic emotional, physical, and academic needs. McLaughlin and Shields (1987) reveal that only 7% of today's schoolchildren come from families that were considered typical in 1965. The Massachusetts Department of Education (1990) alleges that these factors are likely to intensify in the decade to come and will present even greater obstacles to parent involvement.

Chavkin (1989) and Tran (1992) both suggest that language and cultural barriers impede family involvement. Chavkin explains that there is a lack of training about multicultural issues for teachers and administrators about the best ways to involve parents, particularly minority parents. She adds that many minority parents are intimidated by the staff and institutional structure of schools. Tran emphasizes that the Vietnamese community presents unique and special needs as well. These families, by tradition, are modest and humble people who defer to

authority figures. In addition, their social standing dictates their behavior toward such figures of influence and power. The researcher reveals that much of the Vietnamese population does not fully understand that schools are part of the larger community of which they can be contributing members, therefore they do not realize that it is their right and responsibility to participate. The writer's office aide was Vietnamese, and he asserted that this cultural frame of mind was certainly true of that population in this city, as well.

The literature also refers to the complexities of adolescence as an obstacle to home school connection. Epstein (1992) and Jones (1993) note that adolescence may be the most challenging years for students, families and the school. They conclude that schools and families have worked in isolation to address the social, academic, and personal problems that increase as youngsters enter high school. These situations can result in teen pregnancy, gang activity, delinquency, drug and alcohol abuse and dropping out of school. Central to the transition stage of adolescence is the development of autonomy, to become responsible and to act independently. High school students are embarrassed when their parents come to school. They are more concerned with peer expectations than parent wishes. Often school interests dwindle, as social relations and group activities increase.

The structure of most secondary schools hampers effective home/school relations. There are logistical problems. Suddenly in high school, parents must deal with many teachers rather than one, the child may have a counselor with an enormous caseload, and the sheer size of the building may intimidate parents. Often the student is no longer

attending a neighborhood school and might now travel to a very large regional high school with multi-discipline, cross-departmental curriculums that confuse, baffle, and frustrate both the student and family (Henderson, Marburger & Ooms, 1986; Manning, 1992; Stouffer, 1992). The restructuring of the writer's school into houses or smaller administrative units was an attempt to address this problem, but there was much additional work to be done.

Several references in the literature reveal that poor home/school communication eliminated the possibility of an effective partnership with the community. The Massachusetts Department of Education (1990) promotes home/school communication as the foundation for all other parent-school activity. If that foundation is not solid, construction of other initiatives is unproductive. Home-to-community messages, say Hanson, Henry and Hough (1992), are critical because they shape the perspectives of what schools are doing and how they are doing it. If communication is poor, the result can only have negative consequences for everyone concerned.

Ribas (1992) suggests that ineffective communications with parents can create an us and them climate. He notes, as do Henderson, Marburger and Ooms (1986) that consistent, readable and positive two-way communications are part of constructive community relations. Teachers, they reveal, often fail to make good use of telephones, do not routinely mail informative newsletters, parents' nights are sometimes not organized and worthwhile. Staff are occasionally unsympathetic, they neglect personal relationship building, and don't foster professional collegiality.

The first indication of these conscious attitudes is school climate. If school climate is not open, friendly, and helpful, then another basic rudiment necessary for effective home/school relations is missing (Heleen, 1992; Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986). Visitors can see, hear, and sense such a school climate. Absence of welcome signs, no parent lounge, isolation of administrators, and lack of school tours are indication that the school does not embrace visitors and may even appear hostile.

Some teachers believe that their professional status is in jeopardy if parents are involved in activities in school, say Epstein (1986) and therefore they do not foster active participation from home. In one study, Epstein found that 58% of parents rarely or never received requests from teachers to become involved in learning activities with their children at home. The same study showed that fewer than 30% of the parents reported that teachers gave them any ideas to help their children in reading and math.

A major cause for the lack of family involvement in urban centers is the inability to establish a link with underrepresented families through traditional means. In these families, food, clothing, health, safety, housing and employment are paramount. The burdens of everyday life are enormous. Such concerns divert a family's attention from education. Communication with these families presents a challenge (Austin, 1992; Davies, 1991; Duncan, 1992; Heleen, 1992; Jackson & Cooper, 1992; Massachusetts Department of Education, 1989; Olson, 1990).

In an effort to conduct a thorough review of the literature,

investigate the true global nature of this problem, and to compare and contrast information gleaned from the search with the specific problem addressed in this initiative, the writer examined several topical areas, including education, sociology and psychology.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The following goals and expectations were projected for this practicum. The goal of the writer was that there would be an increase in the involvement of ninth grade families in this urban high school and an improvement in home/school communication. It was the expectation of the writer that improved communication and an increase in family involvement would develop a strong school/home relationship, promote a friendly climate in the school and result in a more effective high school.

Expected Outcomes

The following outcomes were projected, by the writer, for this practicum. It was expected that at the 1993 fall high school open house that at least 25 of the 52 teachers in the grade nine house would report meeting at least 10 family members of their students. It was expected by the writer that at the 1993 fall grade nine parents' night, there would be a minimum of 150 family members present. It was expected by the writer that a survey of grade nine staff at the conclusion of the practicum would indicate that 25 of 32 teachers rate the school's communication

as good. It was expected by the writer that a post-implementation survey of grade nine families would indicate that 40 of 60 families rate the school's openness and welcome to families as good. It was also expected that personal observations of the writer would indicate that families have a good understanding of school events, activities and programs and that their attendance at such events would have improved after implementation of the practicum.

Measurement of Outcomes

It was expected by the writer that implementation of this practicum would effect positive change in the work setting. Assessment after implementation was essential to measure the writer's projected outcomes. The measurement of outcomes would provide data used to illustrate the degree of success or failure of the initiative.

One means of collecting evidence of increased family involvement in the school and improved home/school communication would be to record the number of family members that attend school events. After the fall 1993 high school open house, the writer would poll teachers as to the number of family members that they met with at the open house. Family members would be defined as primary caregivers of a ninth grade student or a designated representative of that caregiver. A caregiver would be defined as being a parent, stepparent, grandparent, fosterparent, or official guardian. Other siblings of the student would not be recorded in the tally. The writer would total the number of family members visiting each teacher and compare these figures with the

number of family members that attended the open house and met with teachers in 1992.

A similar mechanism would be utilized to measure a change in family involvement and communication after implementation. The writer would record the number of family members that attend the grade nine parents' night in the fall of 1993. Family members would be distinguished as previously defined. The writer would also have two other staff members record the number of family members present as a system of checks and balances. The number of family members in attendance would be compared with the number that attended the parent's night in 1992 and the difference would be used as evidence.

The writer would also make use of a survey to provide data to evaluate the success of this initiative. The instrument used by the writer in this survey was Taking Stock; The Inventory of Family, Community and School Support for Student Achievement (Berla, Garlington, & Henderson, 1993). This new inventory developed by prominent researchers from the National Committee for Citizens in Education was selected by the writer primarily due to recent field testing in other urban areas and availability in Spanish. It was designed around five basic elements of effective school family partnerships. The first element is reaching out to families. This section of the questionnaire is intended to examine the questions, "What is the school is doing to create effective two-way communications with families and how is the school extending itself to the community and inviting parents and citizens to share in the life of the school?" (p. 2). The second section of the inventory is welcoming families to the school building. This section addresses the

questions, "How does the school make family members feel comfortable when they come to school and what is being done to show parents that they really belong there?" (p.3).

At the conclusion of the initiative the writer would ask the same 32 staff members that were inventoried prior to implementation to answer complete Taking Stock once more. Their responses to the first section, reaching out to families would be examined and the results compared with their responses given on the same section the previous year. Although the entire inventory would be scored, this section would be utilized in measuring the practicum outcomes with regard to improved home/school communication.

Taking Stock would be the instrument to survey parent perceptions of the school's openness and welcome to families. The inventory would be administered to 60 family members. This group of ninth grade families would be chosen at random and accurately represent the general population. The questionnaire would be administered in the respondents' first language. The survey would be conducted by designees of the writer by phone over a one week period. The responses to the welcoming families to the school section of the inventory would be the primary focus here. They would be compared by the writer to parent responses to the same section prior to implementation.

Taking Stock also contains a section of short open-ended questions to elicit other needs, recommendations and perceptions regarding home/school relations. Responses to these questions would be compiled, from both the staff and family inventory, by the writer, for discussion in the practicum report. The writer would also compare the

data collected to show agreement and discrepancies in perception between staff and families with regard to the same questions.

A final mechanism used to measure the projected outcomes of this initiative would be the personal observations of the writer. The writer would record his perceptions of the effectiveness of home/school communications and changes in family involvement. These comments would be recorded in a journal during the endeavor. A comparison of pre and post-practicum personal observations would be conducted by the writer.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

The problem, as reported by the writer, was that there had been poor family involvement in the ninth grade of this urban school and that there was a lack of effective home/school communication. In an effort to generate solutions to this problem the writer examined the literature and gleaned many corrective measures and solution strategies addressing the issue.

Parents, families and all community members, as stakeholders, should participate and take part in the decision making processes in education. Moles (1987) discusses the importance of parents sitting on advisory boards. Educational leaders must seriously rethink the meaning of influence, and control as related to the complete operation of schools. Schools cannot serve the needs, if they do not know or listen to the customer (Dixon, 1992; Loucks, 1992). Chavkin (1989) tells us that minority parents should be asked how they would like to participate in their child's education and must be in on decision making. In the 1960s, Comer was undertaking ambitious parent involvement projects and noted, "a contributor to dramatic school improvement is meaningful parent involvement, including membership on a school management

team that sets objectives and strategies regarding school climate, academics and staff development" (as cited in Flaxman & Inger, 1992, p.17).

A number of federal education programs include provisions for, or require, parent involvement in the planning, operation and evaluation of the program. Chapter 1, Compensatory Education for the Disadvantaged, The Bilingual Education Act, Education of the Handicapped Act-PL 94 142, Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, and Head Start are just a few of the major legislative actions with key family involvement components (Henderson & Marburger, 1990). Certainly, mandating parent involvement does not in itself, create effective partnership, but policies do, according to Chrispeels (1991), establish a framework, express commitment, and apply pressure for the implementation of basic plans.

Rich (1988) suggests that parent-to-parent networks are important support systems and conduits of vital information in the community, and that the school is the core of the network. Those parents that become very effective may, as Vandegrift and Greene (1992) suggest, become parent advocates. They are effective because they meet parents where they are.

Research indicates that parents' evaluation of teachers and the teachers' communication practices are highly related. The implication is that, "teachers' communication practices influenced parents' feeling of comfort with the school, which then influenced parents' involvement in their children's learning" (Hollifield, 1993, p. 10).

Personalized written communication is a crucial piece of

parent/school collaboration. A welcome letter to parents at the beginning of the year and when new students enter the school provides a basic hello to newcomers and initiates the school's congenial feelings. Personalized written communication sends the message that the school values the addition of this family to the school community and welcomes participation. User-friendly home/school handbooks in appropriate languages should also be provided to parents and either mailed or made available at open houses (Massachusetts Department of Education, 1990; Wanat, 1992).

Numerous researchers note the importance of providing a steady stream of information from school to the home in the form of a newsletter. The frequency and timeliness is more important than the length. Newsletters are most appropriate when they are professionally formatted, know the audience, include family input, and are simple and readable (Chavkin, 1989; Hansen, Henry, & Hough,1992; Massachusetts Department of Education, 1990; Stouffer, 1992; Tran, 1992).

Conventional wisdom tells us, say D'Angelo and Adler (1991) that person-to-person communication is the best communication. Well planned visits whether at home or school are valuable in removing barriers to beneficial home/school relationships. Davies (1991) purports that a home visitor program is a salient ingredient for worthy community outreach. This is particularly effective with underrepresented families. Such families may not be linked with the school, but a collaborative engagement like home visits will foster relations with them. Heleen (1992), Ribas (1992), and Warner (1991) also emphasize the importance of home visits as often the most appropriate outreach to urban families

and dipstick to test the educational atmosphere of the home.

Certainly personal contact with parents via telephone is the next best thing to in-person contact. Schools however, must commit to this endeavor. If schools are serious about proper home/school communications they must provide the resources. Many authors cite the need for ample telephone accessibility for teachers. Some suggest schools provide cordless and celiular phones for teacher use in the classroom (Jennings, 1990; Massachusetts Department of Education, 1990; Ribas, 1992).

Stouffer (1992) professes that the initial thrust into family involvement should be social. He maintains that once parents are involved in fine art performances, athletics, and other such events, then school staff can diplomatically move on toward increasing educational involvement. The Massachusetts Department of Education (1989) strategies for involving underrepresented families agrees. They suggest engaging families by holding ethnic and cultural festivals. This serves many purposes. Usually reluctant families are attracted into the building and the school demonstrates their interest in the family's heritage.

Parent centers, say many family involvement authorities, are fruitful means of families sharing in their child's education. Lightfoot got it right, when she said, "The presence of parents can transform the culture of a school" (as cited in Davies, 1991, p. 378). A space in the building that parents can call their own, a place that is neutral turf, a room with a coffee pot, a phone and a friend for other families to chat with, this is the parent center and is the nucleus of on-site parent

involvement. The range of useful activities emanating from a parent center, says Heleen (1992), are nearly endless. They are, she says, a one-stop, facility for family, faculty, and community services.

If you welcome them, they will come. Henderson, Marburger and Ooms (1986) proclaim that a sign to welcome visitors must be posted on the front door. Every aspect of the school must open, helpful and friendly. Schools must overcome their image to some parents as a fortress and replace that with a vision of hospitality. Flaxman and Inger (1992) reinforce that these signs in and around the school must be printed in languages of school families, be informative, and simple.

In this age of information and technology, Epstein (1985) offers the suggestion that home computers can play a key role in home school communication and boosting school skills. Connecting schools and families with this electronic link opens infinite possibilities. The potential to motivate students, include families in learning, provide home evening tutoring, network students together and accommodate the possibility of parent-teacher e-mail leaves little to the imagination of innovative educational leaders.

Another strategy to address the problem is to institute a parent greeters program. Trained parent greeters welcome family members as they enter the school. These receptionists are the customer service representatives of the school. Developed from a pool of parent volunteers, they serve as a communications link with the school (Massachusetts Department of Education, 1989).

In a similar community as the setting for this initiative, Chandler (1991) reports that the high school cable television station, as well as,

the local cable station became central links between the school and the community. Messages and information could be easily and inexpensively brought into living rooms. This resulted in an effective tool to reach out to underrepresented families.

Another important and often overlooked tether to these families is through their community church. Many low-income and minority families rely on the church for stability in their lives. Chandler (1991) and Chavkin (1989), both reinforce this idea. As the keynote speaker at a family involvement mini-summit, Davies asserted that, "schools have the responsibility for orchestrating the exchange of resources, personnel, and services between and among all of the agencies that effect the well-being of children" (cited in Massachusetts Department of Education, 1991, p. 21). Community religious leaders hold the confidence and trust of their congregation and can be strong advocates for schools.

By the nature of their job, school social workers and school psychologists, are very involved in work with parents. Most of these ancillary school workers see working with parents as an essential piece of their role. It seems prudent then, since they have become an established member of today's school staff, that these professionals take leadership roles in facilitating healthy partnerships with families (Epstein, in press; Kurtz & Barth, 1989).

Often there are inherent tensions between schools and families, some staff may be uncomfortable having parents in the school, and some teachers are afraid of encounters with parents that they may feel are overly assertive. A helpful and necessary solution strategy suggested by Henderson, Marburger, and Ooms (1986) stresses that administrators

need to provide well planned staff development to assist teachers in working with families. The training needs to be widespread, encompassing public schools and leadership training institutes. University schools of education must also adopt courses and training in the area of home/school relations for those that will soon enter the field.

A number of valuable ideas surfaced in the review of the literature. The writer also generated other possible solutions that came to mind during the search process.

Considering the size of the freshman class and the idea of using technology in communications, the writer suggested that a computer auto-dialer might be used to contact homes with short messages in day and evening hours without the use of school personnel. This is a fast and economical method of reminding families of important dates, inviting parents to events, and maintaining consistent home/school communications in addition to personal telephone calls.

The writer also proposed that the school might develop relationships with housing project management. Often information did not reach families when sent home with students. If public housing bulletin boards posted school announcements and notices greater access may be possible. Many housing units are owned by the city, therefore cooperative city leadership could spur this initiative.

Public libraries can also serve as non-threatening, off-site locations to meet underrepresented families. Libraries are usually interested in disseminating useful information and often collaborate with schools in offering a broad range educational programs.

An additional strategy generated by the writer, was the use of

special interest newspapers to spread the word regarding home/school relations. In this city, the Latino community was served by a native language newspaper. By printing articles promoting family involvement, the school could target a population not reached through English printed media.

There are many types of parent involvement. A systemic approach to involvement is clearly most effective. Using such a comprehensive plan entails utilizing all types of family and community interaction. In a limited capacity parents would be used as decision makers in this initiative, but certainly families must be involved in system-wide planning with regard to all educational matters.

Another solution suggested in this literature search was the development parent centers. The writer felt this to be a critically important strategy required for successful school/home relationships, and though the writer would suggest that the school administration move in that direction, the design is outside the focus of this enterprise. While parents as teachers, parents as learners and parents as advisors and decision makers are necessary components of a community partnership, effective communication is the foundation of all these involvement activities and establishing a solid foundation in this regard before building these other structures was the goal of this initiative.

The proposed ideas regarding written communication, welcome areas, greeters, collaboration with community organizations, and use of the media for community outreach all had merit, fit the needs of the population and were not dependent on significant financial commitment. Other suggestions, such as, face-to-face communication and

home/school computer networks were less practical in this setting. The school employed one parent liaison, as a result of budget limitations, for all 2000 students and computer communications, in this city, were plainly not feasible.

Description of Selected Solutions

The writer was prepared to try several possible solutions in an effort to increase family involvement and improve communication to develop a stronger relationship between families and the school.

The writer would form a parent/school/community advisory committee (PSCC), to guide and monitor the school's family involvement initiatives. The composition of the PSCC would reflect the diverse population of the community and would include the grade nine assistant principal, one teacher, three parents, one member of a community service organization and the writer. This community service organization worked in grass-root projects to educate, organize and empower the public to become proactive in many activities, particularly those involving youth. The writer would solicit parents from names suggested by eighth grade counselors that were familiar with the incoming grade nine class. The PSCC had an enormous responsibility in this project and would consistently meet throughout the undertaking.

The writer would oversee the design and posting of language appropriate, user-friendly signs in and outside the building to welcome visitors, give directions and provide basic information. The signs would be bright and visually attractive. The signs would be a collaborative

effort of the high school art and home economics department, students and local businesses.

The writer would design and implement a student staffed reception area and greeters program to meet visitors, dispense information and provide escort service. The reception area built by students from the industrial arts classes, would simulate the reception area of a hotel or office building. The writer would train 40 junior and senior students, selected from study periods, to serve at the reception area. Four students, with multiple language skills competence, would attend the reception desk each of the eight periods during the school day. The remaining students would be on-call, to be utilized when other students are absent. The students would receive training in customer service skills. As visitors enter, they would be greeted, signed in, given fundamental information, then escorted to their destination. Friendly, courteous, and helpful customer service would be the central focus of the greeters program. Student greeters would receive 2.5 graduation credits for each semester they participate in the program.

The writer would design and implement a student led orientation tour program for new students and parents. In a similar fashion to the greeters program, students would be trained as school tour guides. Again, friendly and congenial attitude would be key in the training of these students. Students would offer tours of the building to new student entries and their families. Student tour guides would be trained by the writer and would be called for this service only when they were not in class. Tours would be arranged either by the counselors or the assistant principal. These students would not receive credit for their

volunteer efforts, but would be compensated with tickets to school events.

Staff development would be a critical component of community involvement. The writer would assist in the organization of in-service training for the entire school staff to address the issues of family involvement, working with parents and cultivating a customer service attitude with the central office administrator of staff development. The writer would propose that the school be the site of a conference or mini-summit on school/family involvement.

The writer with the support of the assistant principal and the PSCC would see that additional telephones be made available to staff. The telephones should be installed in an area providing privacy and quiet. The installation of these phones would be the first step in effort to encourage teachers to increase two-way communications. The use of these phones for that purpose, by teachers, would be a priority of the house administration and teachers would be asked to document all calls made to parents.

The writer, with input from the assistant principal, would prepare a family welcome letter and grade nine information home/school booklet for distribution to all families. The letter would be mailed just before the opening of school and a similar letter will be mailed to all new student entries during the school year.

The writer would manage the writing, publishing and mailing of a newsletter providing families access to current information from school. All staff members and students would have input for the newsletter. The letter would include information about the school and community that

is relevant to grade nine students and their families. The newsletter would be distributed by mail during each quarter. It was the plan of the writer, that during the third quarter, the PSCC and volunteers, would assume responsibility of the newsletter.

The writer would establish procedures for contributing articles to the local Spanish language newspaper to build support and foster interest in the school. The writer would elicit help in this action from the PSCC and Latino faculty members with ties to the community and obvious cultural awareness.

Access to local cable TV would also be the responsibility of the writer. The initiative would use local cable TV public service programming to reach out to families showcasing school activities and generating family interest. The writer would arrange interviews with school personnel, parents and students, highlight fine art performances, and would feature the home/school initiative. One such cable program was conducted in Spanish and would be utilized for this purpose.

The writer would also exercise use of the high school's local access cable TV station. Under the direction of the audio-visual instructor, programming in both Spanish and English would be produced in the high school studio. Programs would focus on the importance of communicating with teachers, visiting the school, and attending school events.

Another source of media reaching out is radio. The writer would collaborate with the local AM radio station in providing families a forum for dialog with school staff in all languages by way of a radio call-in talk show. The writer would canvas the staff and PSCC for programming

ideas and potential guests. The talk shows, conducted in Spanish as well as English, would share information and draw valuable parent feedback.

In an effort to reach many families in a short period of time, during after school hours, the writer would send short messages to homes by use of a computer auto-dialer. Information sent in several languages by auto-dialer, although only one-way, can disseminate school news to parents at times when they may be home. It would be especially useful with last minute situations, just before events occur, as a last minute reminder. The school already owned such a machine, thus this strategy would have no financial impact.

One such use of this technology would be to notify parents about open house and parents' night. The writer would also increase the publicity regarding these evening school/family affairs. The writer would also arrange childcare for families on the evening of parents' night at no cost.

The writer would organize, in collaboration with the PSCC and the food services manager, a holiday school/family social event. Food would be provided and there will be entertainment by the high school band and choir. This music and food festival would celebrate home/school relationships and the holiday season together.

The writer would also initiate an Education Sunday Program soliciting help from local clergy to encourage families to become involved in the education of their children. First approaching the council of churches, then individual religious leaders, the writer would arrange a cooperative presentation at church services to cultivate a systemic

approach to educating the community's youth and welcoming families into this effort with open arms.

Report of Action Taken

It was the genuine feeling of the writer from the outset, that this initiative would succeed and achieve the desired goals of increasing involvement, improving communication and ultimately developing better home/school relations. The plan had promise and merit because of three factors. First, all families care about their children, want them to do well in school and ultimately succeed in life. The population in this setting, though new to this country shared in this vision. Second, the school department was concerned about family involvement and had enthusiastically supported such efforts at lower grades. Third, the writer was fully committed to the initiative and felt that his stature among the staff would generate collegiality and a commitment towards success.

Setting the stage and laying the ground work for implementation the writer took several steps prior to executing the plan during the last few remaining days of the school year. The writer met with the high school principal and assistant principals to seek approval for the initiative and attended a family and community involvement conference to examine model programs and explore what is new and working in school and community projects. A solid foundation seemed to be in place and all the key players were coached and notably enthusiastic.

In the later part of the summer an event occurred that would have a profound impact on the project. The high school principal and the

assistant superintendent of schools announced that they had both accepted new positions and were leaving their current jobs before the opening of school. They were both key players in this initiative.

The assistant superintendent had been focused on change at the secondary level and was a visionary leader. He had been a designer and activist in school reform and had created an environment of hope in the school. He was open to innovative practice and had promised sturdy support for the writer's initiative.

The loss of the principal was, however, a far greater devastation to the operation of the high school. He had been the architect of restructure at the high school, restructure that was not yet complete. He had been an agent of change. He had been an inspiration, not only to the writer, but to others that still held hopes that, though successful inner city schools may be an endangered species, they are not all dead. The writer had collaborated with the principal on this initiative and had developed a relationship of unconditional trust. There was a shared vision of this school and a visible sense of teamwork. Now, a friend, a colleague, and a mentor was missing. As the activities progressed, the support and encouragement of this mentor would become more noticeably absent.

Nevertheless, a worthwhile project should succeed and be duplicatable under any circumstances and in any situation. The writer quickly met with the new interim principal and presented the plan. It was immediately evident that, though she supported the initiative, there would be little direct assistance from her office. She was consumed and overwhelmed by the position and the title of interim principal left her

little power and decision making capacity. In light of this lack of central leadership, the writer turned to the grade nine assistant principal for support; however, the absence of strong leadership support from the top would hamper financial resources and limit the scope of implementation.

After several meetings with the grade nine assistant principal, it was mutually decided that grade nine should be the target group for the project and not the entire school, since the circle of influence encompassed the ninth grade house, and the core of support for the initiative was embodied here. What follows is a chronological description of actions taken during the implementation of this initiative.

The parent/school/community advisory committee (PSCC) was formed with the writer, the assistant principal, a faculty member and the parent liaison as members. The parent liaison, also a parent, was an unexpected and very positive addition to the staff. The liaison was hired with grant money from a parent mobilization project administered by the community service organization mentioned previously. This part-time, bilingual, bicultural liaison worked closely with the writer during the initiative and was invaluable interacting with underrepresented families. The PSCC met throughout the initiative at designated, bimonthly times as well as on other occasions as needed. This committee was a precious resource of guidance to the writer, reflecting the perceptions of administration, faculty, and the community. Early ground rules were established for the PSCC emphasizing that there were no stripes, that all members would agree to disagree, and that the mission was to implement the initiative, centering not on the operation of the school, but on the school's relationship and communication with families.

The writer informed the school department's director of special programs, who is also the system's grant writer, of the project. A verbal endorsement was acknowledged though no funds were offered. The PSCC did not see lack of funding as a bottleneck to the initiative as the principal noted that there were some, though limited, school accounts available for the few expenses that had been estimated for full implementation.

After two lengthy meetings to organize the strategic plan and formulate specific tactics, the committee declared that first on the agenda was the design of a welcome letter to families of new freshmen.

The writer constructed a welcome letter of warm embrace for new incoming ninth grade families. The language was simple, the message clear. It was a salutation of hospitality noting that the transition from eighth to ninth grade is often confusing, anxious, and yet exciting. It was meant as the first handshake, a reaching out, from the school. The letter noted that the school was an open, safe, friendly, and helpful place. It expressed the importance of a strong, healthy, and consistent relationship between school and the home and announced the first get-to-know-the school, grade nine family evening. The letter offered the names, positions and telephone numbers of the ninth grade staff and encouraged contact.

The letter was then translated into Spanish by the parent liaison. Using school stationary the letter was individually printed, English on one side, Spanish on the other, with a laser printer and all 640 were placed in envelopes with a computer address label. Every effort was made to construct the professional appearance of individual attention

and avoid the xerox look of mass production. The writer wanted to convey the notion that the family was important to the school.

When the writer approached the principal for the school's bulk rate postal number, she indicated that there were only sufficient funds in the postal account to mail first quarter progress reports. She suggested that the letters be hand carried home by students.

To no avail, the writer canvassed other sources, then paid for the first class mailing from personal funds hoping to be reimbursed at a future date. It was felt that maintaining the integrity of the personal touch was vital to our first communication.

Clearly, school climate is a key ingredient for successful user-friendly schools. As previously stated, the dark, gloomy entrance to the school offered a somber feeling to visitors. Informational signs were outdated and unclear. The writer met with the lead teacher of the school's art department to brainstorm a remedy for this issue.

The art teacher has received recognition from museum curators, he works part-time as an architectural tour guide, and serves as an advisor to the city's historical archives board. He immediately understood the importance of visual imagery and the associated emotional impact upon those who enter the building. After touring the entrance areas, he offered many outstanding suggestions that the writer and the PSCC had not explored. His proposed recommendation was to design colorful banners and flags to hang in the school's entryway, brighten the area with new paint, clean the antique marble, and enhance the lighting.

His concept was founded in the belief that the banners and flags would not only add warmth and life to the area, but that their movement

would also illustrate a feeling of action and youth. He also pointed out that these pennants were less likely to entice graffiti and vandalism than were painted signs. He had an additional concern, in that great efforts should be taken to maintain the integrity of the building's historical architecture. He noted that previous attempts to paint signs on the building exterior had tarnished the original designer's intent to denote an entrance of academic dignity.

The art teacher and his senior portfolio class spent two months on design. The designs were then forwarded to the home economics teacher. The home economics department's creative stitchery classes worked weeks on the project and produced the final product. New updated signs were also produced by the art students to direct visitors to various offices in the building. The project required little funding and monetary needs were met by the school's business partner. Winter in the northeast delayed repairs to the entrance way by the city's department of public buildings. In late spring a new opening of the entryway is planned.

Another component to a user-friendly, customer service approach of welcoming school visitors was to implement a student staffed greeters program. The writer, with immense support from the grade nine assistant principal, established a cluster of 24 upper class students that worked as student aides in the grade nine office. Three students were assigned for each of the eight scheduled periods of the day. The office received from 12 to 20 parents and other visitors per day. Each student, nearly all of whom spoke at least two languages, was trained by the assistant principal and the writer. These students greeted visitors, escorted family members to other offices in the building, provided basic

information about the school, translated for staff and parents, and assisted in the understanding of cultural diversity. The student greeters received a pass/fail grade and were awarded 2.5 credits for this service.

These same students as well as the grade nine student council members also served as student tour guides. These tour guides, trained by the writer and assistant principal, offer tours to new students and families and act as ambassadors to quell the fears and anxiety common to most high school transfers. The tour guides were also extremely active during the orientation of eighth grade students that will enter the high school in the fall.

The transition to high school is clearly a challenge for many adolescents and their families. The implementation of this program offered all grade nine families an opportunity to tour the facility, sit in classes, freely ask questions of the tour guides, and get a feel for the environment within the building. The greeters and tour guides program was instituted during the second month of the initiative.

The writer feels that an essential component that enhances most school initiatives is continuing staff development. Prior to implementation of this project there was a great deal of interest in establishing professional development time dedicated to training the entire staff regarding family involvement issues.

At the opening of school the superintendent announced that all planned staff development days in the year's calendar would be devoted to the high school's accreditation self study. This was first seen as a serious roadblock to the initiative; however, the writer is also the steering committee chair for the self study. Rather that abort the staff

development plans, the writer used the self study planning session as a vehicle to promote the initiative and enlighten the staff as to the critical importance of family involvement and communication. All of the standards for accreditation, are in some part associated with the goals of this initiative. The process of accreditation was used as a catalyst to further the significance and cultivate the objectives of the enterprise.

The ability for parents to be in direct contact with their child's teacher has long been known to be an asset to schools and according to the research also increases student achievement. The addition of available telephones was a core request of the PSCC from the onset of this initiative and was accomplished with the aid of the parent liaison. A telephone was made available for teacher use in the parent liaison's office. An additional telephone was also installed in an office that was requested by the chair of the accreditation steering committee. This private office was made available to all teaching staff when not in use by the steering committee.

The grade nine assistant principal requested that teachers log their calls to parents. This served a dual purpose, assuring consistent contact with parents, as well as, maintaining records for future use in parent/student/teacher conferences.

As part of new school policy, guidance counselors furnished every new student a parent/student handbook as part of the school entry process. A page in the book was signed by the student and the parent/guardian and returned to the counselor. This process assured that each student and family had been given all necessary information about school policies, calendar, rules, expectations and procedures. The

book was made available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

A salient component of this initiative was the launching of a newsletter to provide a constant flow of information to families. The PSCC discussed this element of the initiative on numerous occasions. The committee was adamant that the newsletter should be mailed, not hand carried by the student. This condition caused significant delay with the newsletter project. The obstacle was money. Sources had been exhausted and the experience with the welcome letter had taught the writer a valuable and poignant lesson. A commitment for funding must be certain before projects reach completion.

As the year progressed and a permanent principal had not yet been named, it became clear to the writer and the PSCC that the plan must be altered. A newsletter was finally produced, through the cooperative efforts of one parent, two teachers, the assistant principal, the writer and three students. The newsletter highlighted school events, spotlighted the accomplishments of several freshman, featured suggestions for families to assist in their child's education, and invited families to upcoming school events. The newsletter was put together by the writer at his home, translated by the parent information center and then appropriate language copies were distributed to all grade nine students to carry home.

The writer and members of the PSCC engaged in discussions with the editor and owner of the Spanish language newspaper. Plans were ongoing and progressing with satisfaction when an incident began to unfold that raised serious questions. The editor became involved in a dramatic controversy involving a teacher and a charge of sexual

harassment. The incident became ugly producing cries of racial discrimination. The editor, also a Latino teacher at the school, was suspended without pay, picketed the school for days with hundreds of students from the bilingual program, and was ultimately arrested for disturbing a school assembly. Considering the circumstances, it was a unanimous decision of the committee to terminate our association with the newspaper. This initiative was meant to foster positive relations in the community and it was felt that we should distance ourselves from such incidents. This was not to avoid controversy, for such topics were often issues that were discussed at length at parent meetings, but that the PSCC felt racial upheaval and ongoing litigation were contrary to fostering positive relationships and an association might be misinterpreted.

The purpose of the local cable TV station was to inform, educate, and entertain the public. This is also a successfully proven conduit into the homes of many underrepresented families. The writer met with the producer and host of a community service program that focused on the issues within the Latino community. The show is entirely in Spanish. The host was enormously enthusiastic about collaborating with the high school on a project.

During the implementation period of the initiative there had been a dramatic increase in domestic, street, and school violence in the city. Adolescent gang activity had multiplied, several weapons had been discovered in school, and there had been a near fatal shooting in front of the school. The show's producer saw this as an opportunity.

The talk show host thought that the issue of violence had a close

connection with the relationship between home and the school. The writer asked a Latino teacher to be interviewed on the show. The show was taped and aired the following week. The topic centered on the school's successful peer mediation project and the necessity for all individuals, young and old to learn the elements of conflict resolution. The host planned additional programming involving the school and has asked for further collaboration. The enthusiasm generated by this venture and the early signs of success caused the PSCC to concentrate on this media and abandon any plan for use of radio. The committee's representative of the Latino community suggested that these efforts would produce far greater results and the committee voted in that direction.

The use of the school's local access cable TV was been an ongoing strategy of the initiative. As an integrated part of weekly productions the director, and students in the audio-visual classes have written, produced and anchored segments that address issues of family involvement. Rather than entire productions focused on the importance of communicating with teachers, visiting the school or attending school events, these subjects were all constantly woven into the fabric of productions like the weekly school news, sporting events, music performances, interviews with school staff, covering community events, and even rap shows. Integrating the flavor of the initiative into the curriculum, so to speak, of the cable programming schedule brought these issues into homes in a subliminal approach while viewers watched shows targeting their specific interests.

Several years ago the high school purchased a computer auto-

dialer. The auto-dialer was used to contact homes of absent students daily and informs parents of their child's absence via a prerecorded message in the native language of the home. Though truly a laudatory venture this had been the only function of this device. Families of constant truants heard this message daily and soon developed a negative image of the school. The writer used this technology in a positive manner as well. The initiative utilized the auto-dialer to deliver good news about students and the school, to foster better communications between school and the home. The apparatus was used to send messages in several languages on weekends about upcoming events, to remind parents about open houses, and parents' night, and to notify families about academic deadlines and mid-term exams. The writer and the bilingual counselor recorded short messages on Friday afternoons and on Monday the writer reviewed the printout to examine who received the message, what phones had been disconnected and observed any errors with the system. In this manner over 600 homes were contacted at no cost, without taxing school lines, without use of personnel, and when most families were home. The messages were always recorded in an upbeat, friendly tone conveying a positive customer service attitude.

A highlight of this project to increase family involvement and improve communication was the accomplishment of a holiday school/family social event. This strategy involved many individuals. The PSCC and the high school music director met on several occasions to finalize every detail of the evening.

The annual holiday concert is an outstanding performance by the school band and nationally recognized school choir. Though the school

has a state of the art auditorium that seats 650, the largest audience the music director could ever remember to date had been 165 in attendance. The concept was to combine a parent meeting, a social event with food, and the musical performance. Those family members that attended the parent social meeting would be offered free tickets to the concert after the meeting.

The affair was scheduled for a Wednesday evening. Announcements were sent home with students two weeks before the evening. The weekend prior to the event a second reminder invitation was sent home via the auto-dialer, and two nights before the concert, grade nine student council members called every freshman home with a personal invitation. The event was also advertised on the school's cable TV station for several weeks. No communication stone had been left unturned.

Student council members prepared massive amounts of home cooked goodies. Many departments in the school prepared exhibits of students work and current projects for display in the library. The PSCC arrived early and with the assistance of the class officers decorated the library. The writer arranged a staffed room adjacent to the library to offer childcare for families during the meeting.

High school staff and class officers were introduced to the family members and the one and a half hour meeting proceeded while students served the refreshments. The interaction with families was intimate and close. Building personal relationships was the focus. In comfortable, non-threatening surroundings teachers, students, and families were getting to know each other. Following the meeting the entire group

retired to the auditorium and enjoyed the concert. The evening ended with a sing-a-long and a visit from a rather plump and jolly bearded man from the north pole in a red suit (the writer).

In communities such as this, families, particularly underrepresented families have a close union with church. The cultures of many immigrant and minority families have a foundation built in strong religious values. As many of these families strive to survive in urban America, they cling to this religious support system. Families that have turned their backs on bureaucratic organizations, like schools, often still have faith and trust in their priest, minister or rabbi. The writer utilized this faith and trust to gain access to these families.

As was noted the school had an excellent choir. Many girls in the choir were also members of local church choirs. This was the connection. The writer and the music director attended an evening church service and developed a relationship with the leaders of the church. A mutual stake in the community, the children, developed a mutual concern. This collaboration also crystallized a stronger personal relationship with these students at school. They felt that their teachers had a sincere interest in their personal lives. The parents and family elders also felt that the educators in the city were more connected to their lives, their families and the welfare of their children. This strengthening of personal relationship between families and the school was the essence of this initiative.

The writer also met a parent at the first, grade nine parents' night and again at the school/family holiday event. In conversation the writer learned that the parent was also a local minister in a church whose

congregation contained many families from the school. The writer did not let the opportunity slip by and developed a collaboration with the minister. The minister and the writer cultivated youth group projects and both promoted a two way channel of information between his church and the school.

As knowledge of these relationships between religious groups and the school spread, other church leaders came forward and made contact with the school. They saw the mutual benefit of positive relationships with the school and the desperate need to collaborate to combat the social blights that tempt youth and cripple the community.

The writer did experience several roadblocks that hampered full implementation of the initiative as planned. Primary to these occurrences was the loss of the principal, and to a lesser extent, the assistant superintendent. The void in leadership cannot be over emphasized. This issue that caused disorder throughout the school and injured staff morale will be further illustrated in the discussion section of this report.

The rapid and substantial increase in violence within the community and the school was also a grave concern that hindered the full potential impact of this initiative. Fear had replaced contentment in many families. Many parents walked their children to the door of the school and picked them up in the afternoon. Most did not leave their homes after dark. The psychology of fear has taught us that violence breeds terror, terror turns to fear and long term fear leads to complacency and apathy. The violent climate of the city has taken a toll on the energy and spirit of families.

Even the weather took a toll on the initiative. This was an extremely harsh winter in the northeast. Record breaking storms dumped enormous amounts of snow in the region, canceling school numerous days and restricting people to their homes. Urban poor are particularly impacted by severe weather conditions.

There were, however, unexpected positive occurrences that enhanced the project and added to success. The creation of the parent mobilization project by the community service organization instituted several programs to elicit support for parent involvement. The school system's bilingual education program formulated parent workshops through their parent advisory council. The special education department began parent support groups at the high school for parents of special needs students, and at the writer's request, opened the groups to all parents.

These are the types of individual efforts that collectively make a difference. No single initiative can impact such a formidable issue as school/family involvement. Cooperation and collaboration of efforts can, together, invoke change.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

The problem, as experienced by the writer, in this inner city high school in the northeast was that there was a lack of effective home/school communication and poor family involvement in the school. The existence of the problem was substantiated by the writer's documentation of data collected from various sources. The existence of the problem in other schools is also well supported in the literature. In an effort to resolve the problem the writer selected and implemented several solution strategies.

The writer formed an advisory committee of representative stakeholders. An effort was executed to initiate an open, friendly and warm atmosphere to enhance school culture and ensure a welcome feeling for visitors. A campaign to provide ongoing personalized written communication, increase telephone communication, and utilize technology was launched. Distinctive plans were developed to use television media to communicate with hard-to-reach underrepresented families. Great efforts were made to address linguistic minority families in their first language and to respect cultural diversity. Strategies were implemented to establish personal relationships between school and

families through family school-based social events. Finally, initiatives were enacted to collaborate with community-based support systems and implement cooperative efforts to improve communication and increase school/family involvement within the community.

Prior to the initiative the writer collected data to support the nature and extent of the problem. The writer tallied the number of family members that each of the 52 staff members in the grade nine house had seen on the evening of the high school open house. As reported earlier, 41 staff reported that they had seen five or less parents on that evening in 1992 and 4 teachers had met with more than five parents. Seven teachers reported not meeting with any parents.

After implementation the same 52 teachers were polled as to the number of parents seen during the 1993 high school open house. Of those polled, 29 reported that they have met with five or less parents. Eighteen teachers reported meeting with five or more parents. Nine of these teachers reported meeting with at least 10 parents. The range varied from a high of one teacher that met with 23 parents to a low of teachers that did not meet any parents. A total of five teachers reported not meeting with any family members at the open house (see Figure 1). Though this indicated a very slight improvement in the number of parents at open house, these results fell short of the writer's projection and this outcome was not met.

The writer projected that a minimum of 150 family members would attend the fall grade nine parents' night. In the fall of 1992, 11 family members had attended the parent's night. During implementation in 1993, 88 family members attended the parents' night (see Figure 2).

Figure 1

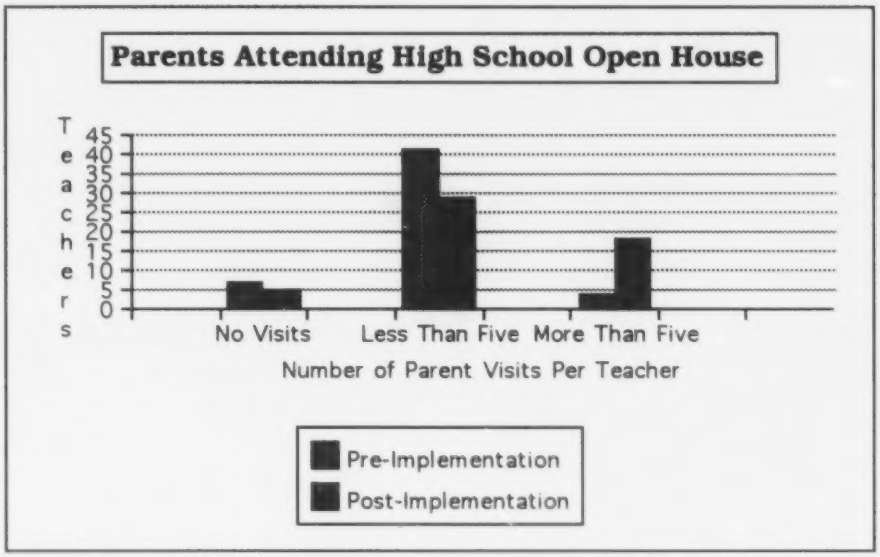
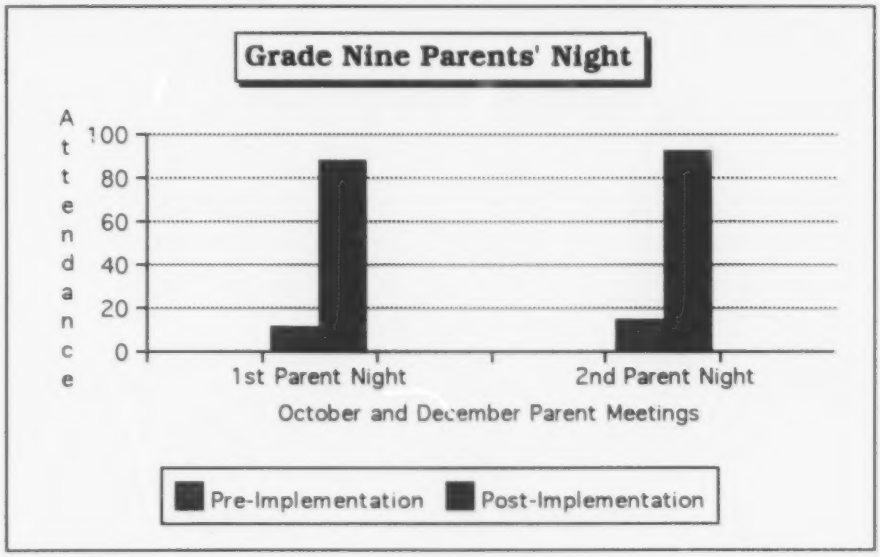


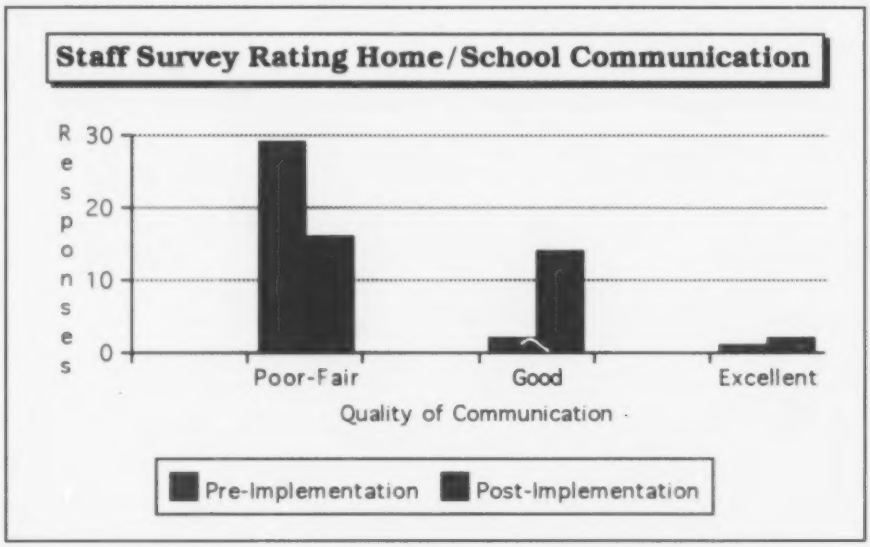
Figure 2



This was a substantial increase in the number of family members in attendance but also fell short of the writer's projected results and this outcome was not met.

A third expected outcome was that a survey of grade nine teachers would indicate that 25 of 32 teachers would rate the school's communication with families as good after implementation. The writer utilized the same inventory, Taking Stock: The Inventory of Family, Community and School Support for Student Achievement, as prior to the initiative. Post implementation, the writer found that 14 grade nine staff rated the school's communication as good, 16 rated the communication as poor to fair, and 2 rated the communication as excellent. Inventory results prior to the initiative had indicated that 29 of 32 teachers rated the school's communication as poor to fair, 2 had rated communication as good and 1 rated communication as excellent (see Figure 3). This outcome did not meet the projected outcome of the writer.

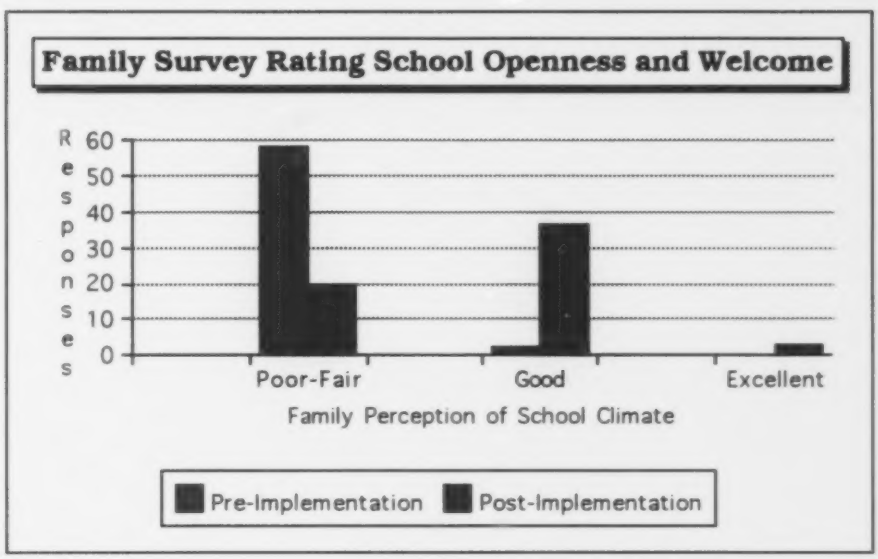
Figure 3



Preceding the initiative an inventory was also given to 60 families to measure their feeling of the school's openness and welcome to families. The questionnaire revealed that 58 of the 60 rated the the school's openness and welcome to families as poor to fair and 2 rated these feelings as good. The writer had projected that at the conclusion of the initiative at least 40 families would rate the schools' openness and welcome as good.

The same inventory was administered by telephone, in the families first language, to 60 new grade nine families after implementation. The inventory revealed that 37 of the 60 rated the school's openness and welcome as good, 20 as poor to fair and 3 as excellent. These results (see Figure 4) indicate a dramatic improvement but still fell short of the writer's projected outcome and therefore, this outcome was not met.

Figure 4



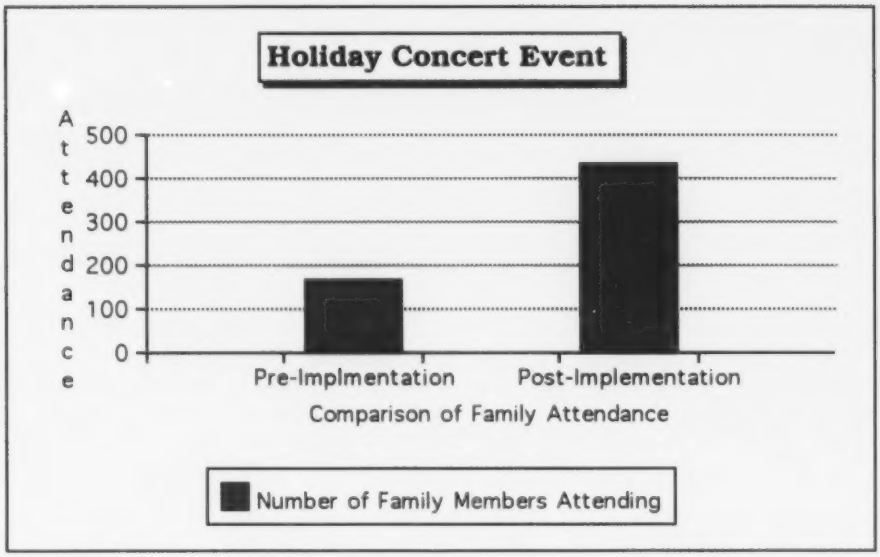
The final expected outcome was that the writer's personal observations would indicate that families had a good understanding of school events, activities and programs and that their attendance had improved during and after the implementation of the initiative. This expected outcome was accomplished. The writer reached the conclusion that this expectation had been met through numerous observations. Primary to the conclusion is that fact that, though the other four expectations were not met, there had been formidable positive movement in each of the outcomes.

Another strong indicator to support this outcome was the dramatic increase of family attendance at school events. There were a total of 92 parents at the second grade nine parents' night in 1993 (see Figure 2). In 1992 the second parent meeting had attracted 14 parents.

This was the meeting that had been combined with the holiday social event. That same evening the holiday concert had 435 people in the audience According to records kept by the music director, the largest audience to have ever attended the holiday concert prior to the initiative, which had been performed for the last eleven years, was 165 persons (see Figure 5).

During the question and answer portion of the meeting, the writer asked those in attendance, what had prompted families to attend. The most common reply was the personal invitation, the next most common response was because of the free concert ticket, and tne third most common reason was due to the written notice that had been sent home. The implication was clear. A comprehensive application of strategies to solicit family attendance to school events had been successful.

Figure 5



None of these strategies had ever been used prior to the initiative. The writer and the grade nine assistant principal have both noted a significant increase in telephone inquires from parents, scheduled and unscheduled visits from parents, and a substantial increase of requests for school building tours by families.

In contrast to these results, it is important to note that the assistant principals of the other three houses all report that attendance at their parent meetings decreased in 1993 from 1992. Though data was not collected at these meetings, this statement helps confirm, to the writer, that the last expected outcome had been met.

Discussion

A clear message has emanated from the last 25 years of educational research regarding the elements that contribute to effective schools. A reoccurring theme in these findings is that parents' involvement in their childrens' education is fundamental to their success and contributes to their level of achievement in school. Schools that implement proactive outreach to enlist family involvement particularly from underrepresented families can and do make a difference. This was the premise of this initiative.

In July 1993, the legislature in the state that was the setting for this initiative, enacted what many scholars consider the most comprehensive educational reform statute in the nation. One section of the law mandates all school districts to formulate a written school improvement plan. The plan is required to include a blueprint of parental involvement in the life of the school. An additional section requires that the state department of education establish a parental outreach demonstration program to assess models of parent outreach throughout the commonwealth.

All features of the writer's practicum have been included in the improvement plan of this school and have been presented before the district's school board. As such, each strategy will become permanent policy enacted and implemented by the school. The significance of this action is testament to the merits of the initiative.

It was the writer's intent to evoke change. Change has occurred. Many positive outcomes have resulted that, though not reflected in the

data, emerge daily. The initiative has sparked a heightened awareness of family involvement issues, the need to communicate effectively, and the importance of healthy school/home relationships. A now conversant staff is looking towards home, as a resource, that has been untapped for years. Effective schools don't do things differently, they do different things.

The writer had set high expectations and was aware of this prior to the initiative. One man's ceiling is another man's floor. Most of the outcomes were not met, but very significant improvement was attained in each area. In furthering the initiative the writer will continue to strive for exemplary expectations, but will accept outcomes that indicate continual improvement.

Improvement was attained in the number of families that attended the high school open house, yet it was far below the writer's expectations. On the evening of this affair, a snowstorm was blanketing the city. Consideration was given to cancel the open house, but the interim principal did not want to reschedule the event. Many parents assumed it had been canceled. Many staff were truant for the same reason.

The two grade nine parent nights were enormous successes. Pessimistic staff attended out of curiosity and were astounded at the turnout of parents. Parents remarked that the meeting was informative, stimulating, and most importantly, fun. The first such meeting was a turning point in the initiative. Many faculty members were convinced that parent apathy could not be transposed. The credence that relationships with families were developing encouraged greater

attendance and enthusiasm at the next meeting. An assistant principal from another house was quoted as saying, "I think I'd better attend one of the freshman parent nights to see what we're doing wrong in my house. There were more parents at your meeting the other night than I have seen here in 20 years." This assistant principal was instrumental in the movement to sanction the initiative into school policy. This is strong endorsement.

The writer viewed the holiday concert and meeting as also, a splendid success. Students don't care what you know, till they know that you care. This is the premise of building personal relationships with students and families. Events such as this begin to eliminate the school-based barriers that hinder underrepresented families from approaching involvement in education. Each family that attended was sent a hand written thank you from a member of the freshman student council to crystallize the solidarity that had been activated that evening.

There had also been a solidifying of relationships among the staff as a result of these events. The festive mood and collaborative effort was an emotional release from the daily stresses of teaching in an urban high school. Administrators and teachers, students, and little brothers and sisters, parents and grandparents all arm in arm singing holiday songs; this is the village it takes to raise a child, that the old African proverb speaks of. This was the unexpected, unmeasured outcome that the writer had not projected, but welcomed.

Careful examination of the inventory completed by the staff revealed, not only interesting individual feelings, but a pattern of feelings, an aura, that expressed the mood of the building. The answers

to the opened-ended questions prior to the initiative disclosed despair that little parent involvement existed but hope that the situation would improve. There were some constructive suggestions but a widespread consensus that communication with home was poor but all former efforts had failed. Collectively the staff indicated that the school was a friendly place and that visitors were welcome.

In contrast, the first survey administered to the families indicated an overwhelming feeling that the school was not open and available. The results portrayed that the community's perception of the schools' welcome was incongruous to the perception sensed by the staff. This supports the notion that, how we see ourselves is less important that how others see us. Clearly this uncovered a major problem in the writer's work setting.

After implementation the staff surveys showed an increased awareness and interest in the need for better school/home communication; however, a new enigma surfaced consistently throughout the comments on the inventories' open-ended section. It was a frustration that preceded all answers. The staff was consumed by the lack of leadership in the school. Several teachers simply wrote expletives across their questionnaire such as, "No Principal," "We need Leadership," and "Hire a Principal Immediately, Nothing else Matters!" Others noted that their encouragement had turned to discouragement. Another wrote, "the school is now a ship, without a rudder...we are adrift."

Leadership is not a little thing, it is everything. Individual programs and initiatives may show signs of success, bright lights may shine here and there; but, if effective leadership is absent, the school is

not successful.

This initiative has been, and shall continue to be, a bright light in this school. Constant evaluation and improvement is necessary, but the writer is confident that family involvement initiatives such as this, will enhance the quality of effective schools.

Recommendations

The writer offers several recommendations for the design and implementation of similar initiatives. Strong, enthusiastic top down and bottom up support is essential. Effective leadership is necessary to promote solidarity, provide funding and to carry the vision. Bottom support is crucial to create a climate of collegiality and openness in the school. There needs to be a clear picture of the community and the needs of the stakeholders. Empowering underrepresented families requires the development of personal relationships through innovative outreach. Finally, effective family involvement programs need to become legislated as school policy.

Dissemination

This practicum is incorporated into a book in progress intended for use in graduate schools of education. It will be submitted for publication in Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and will be available through the Nova Southeastern University Information Retrieval Service, Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The writer will present the

work at an upcoming conference and at future symposiums. Course design is currently underway by the writer to disseminate this information as part of a graduate course on urban school violence.

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